

Sermon preached by Mr. Adam Rice at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, April 26, 2020

**FINDING GOD IN OUR HARDSHIPS:  
A MESSAGE OF HOPE**

**John 16:33; Jeremiah 29:11-14**

Hope. Such a small and simple word. Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology defines hope in this way: To trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future. It is our human nature to wish for or hope for things. Young children may hope for a new toy at Christmas or on their birthday. As adults we hope to have a good job to be able to provide for ourselves or, if we have a family, we hope to be able to provide for our family. We use it in greetings.... "I hope you have a great day" or "I hope you have a safe trip." I have often told my children "I hope you remember what I told you" when reminding them to be on their best behavior.

It's easy to talk about hope when things are going well in our lives, isn't it? It is easy to be happy and content when life is good and everything seems right with the world. But what about when things are not so good? What about when we hear bad news, like a family member being diagnosed with cancer? Or when we lose our job unexpectedly? Or when a young life is taken way too soon due to violence, illness or accident? What happens to our hope and faith when everything we own is taken away from us in an instant and our lives are forever changed due to a natural disaster? What happens when life gets really hard? When we feel like we cannot possibly go on? When we feel that God has forsaken us or abandoned us? Where is our hope, our trust, our faith then? Where do we find answers? Where do we find strength?

Too many times over the course of our lives, hardships come crashing in, causing disorder, fear, and madness. Occasionally, it gives fair warning that it is on its way. Other times it comes from out of nowhere. Know this: Hardships can be a tool that Satan uses to instill fear in your life and weaken your faith. Perhaps two of our worst fears are that things will get out of control and that God will abandon us.

Abandonment by God is one of the worst emotions any human could ever experience. It was the greatest of Jesus' agonies on the cross. Matthew captures the moment in Matthew 27:46 where it says, "And Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?'" It's impossible for us to avoid hardships in our lives, but as children of God, we do have a way of dealing with it. We transition our **fear** into **faith** and our **doubt** into **hope**. Faith in the Lord who created us and the hope that He will always work out His will for us in our lives.

Great things are birthed in chaos or hardships and faith is strengthened. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Our hardships provide us with the opportunity to see the mighty hand of God moving in our lives.

With God, great things happen in the midst of hard times and trouble. It is during these hard times that God longs to show His greatness through you.

Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” No matter what we seek, we must first seek Christ and His kingdom.

There was a young man named Aaron. Aaron was 17 years old and had just gotten his driver’s license. He was driving in his truck one night with his 14 year old brother. Their parents were following on the highway behind them. They suddenly found themselves in a torrential rain storm. Aaron, being a new driver, was not experienced with driving a car in such extreme conditions. When he forcefully applied the brakes he lost control of the vehicle. As he and his brother slid down the road the truck began to flip. His parents and younger sister witnessed Aaron being thrown out of the driver’s side window. The pickup rolled over him, and finally came to a stop upside down. Isaac, the 14 year old younger brother, climbed out of the truck and raised his hands to heaven thanking God that he was okay, but he was unaware of what had happened to his older brother. Aaron’s body lay lifeless in the pouring rain. When Isaac looked over and saw him, his praise to God turned into a moment of fear and confusion. Aaron’s mother quickly ran over to him. She held him in her lap as the rain beat down on them, and she knew immediately that her son was not going to make it. Within minutes, she watched her 17 year old son take his last breath.

Everything happened so quickly. Individuals from three other cars who witnessed the accident pulled over and rushed to help. They came up to the mother as she held Aaron in her arms and asked what they could do to help. The only words she could say to them were, “Do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus?” In the darkness of that moment, eternity was on the mind of Aaron’s mother. Her faith was on display for those witnesses to see. Yes, her son was gone, but Jesus was on the scene, so she shared the Gospel with them.

In the weeks to come, the mother received three letters from some of the people who had been on the scene that evening helping. They wanted her to know that that day changed their lives. All three of them had come to know and accept Jesus because of the witness the mother had shared that evening. They saw a heart-torn mother embracing her dead son, yet her faith in Christ spoke to the eternal souls of those who had witnessed the tragedy. In her grief, the words, “Do you know Jesus?” had pierced through the darkness and become words of hope, light and life.

Our lives are full of ups and downs. We can be living our life, going about our daily normal routines and then it can all change in the blink of an eye. That is why it is so important that we find God in the hardships and tough times because He is always there with us. He does not watch us suffer from afar. He does not sit at a distance and wait for us to turn to Him. He is right there with us just like He was right beside that mother and her dying son with His arms wrapped around them in the driving rain comforting her, strengthening her and giving her the life-changing words to say to those witnesses. He will always see us through the difficult hours of fear and uncertainty.

We may never understand why we face hardships. We know that we may never have the answer we so desperately want to hear to one of life's most dreaded questions: "Why?" But there is one thing I do know, one thing I have learned. Before, during and after the hard times that come, God is there! He has proven it time and time again. Knowing this truth, I choose, and we should all choose, to "Seek first!"

About six months after Aaron's death, his mother was not doing well. Her faith had remained strong, but emotionally she was grieving and depressed. Even so, she and her husband faithfully went to church and continued to honor the Lord with their lives. During one church service the pastor said something that did not mean much to them at the time. He said that, in the coming week, the Lord was going to bring a person into someone's life for a brief moment and that this encounter would impact their struggle in a positive way.

A couple days later Aaron's father was eating breakfast, as usual, and reading his Bible on the back porch of their home. His heart was still very heavy with the death of Aaron. Like many times before, he cried out, "Lord, where are you?" He had been asking the Lord this hard question for some time. He was looking for comfort in a place where it appeared as though none could be found. He was worried about his wife's health and was also wondering about his son's eternal destination. Aaron had spent his early teen years running away from God, and while he was overjoyed that Aaron had turned his life over to Christ three months prior to his death, he wanted to know for sure. Did Aaron make it to heaven?

To ease his heartache, the father looked for answers from God. Normally he would go into the house to pray, but on this particular morning he decided to stay out on the porch. He cried out to God from the depths of his heart. He paced back and forth, crying out loudly to God for answers about his son. While he never used his son's name, he simply said "My son" in its place. "Lord, please tell me about my son! Is he with You?" At that moment, he looked up and saw a young man, a complete stranger, standing uninvited in his backyard. He paused and wondered, *What is this man doing in my backyard?* He began to walk towards him. The stranger announced loudly, "I was just passing by and I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to tell you that Aaron is home with the Lord! God is going to bless your children. He is going to bless your wife. This is a message from the Lord."

The father started weeping. He hugged the stranger and said, "My name is Mike." A reply came, "My name is John." Then the father blessed him for his obedience in delivering this much desired news.

In his heartache and anguish, this father sought God and found Him. God heard and answered his prayer. That day, God sent a man, (an angel perhaps?), to encourage the grieving father and reassure him that Aaron was in the presence of the Lord. On that day, joy filled the hearts of Aaron's family and friends. They knew God had not abandoned them. This father's heart, once lying in pieces as he grieved for his son, had been mended by the Lord and his spirit once again began to soar like an eagle.

God is faithful when we cry out in distress. He answers us when we call. We may not all have the same experience as Mike had in his backyard that morning with John, and we may

never personally experience anything remotely similar to this, but we must remain faithful that He will answer our prayers in His time and according to His will. Many of us, myself included, aren't patient enough or quiet enough to wait for His answer. We stop looking for God and often lose hope. In our struggles and challenges we must persevere and not give up. We must call upon the Lord in our times of need. Seek Him diligently, be patient and wait upon Him. Just as life can change in a moment, finding God can turn everything around in a moment as well. Our strength can be renewed instantly. We can mount up on wings like eagles. We can run and not grow weary. We can walk and not grow faint.

Where do we turn to find hope and renew our faith? Where do we look for the answers to life's tough questions? To whom do we turn when we feel like life is spiraling out of control? We have a powerful and mighty God that is over, under and in the midst of all the struggles we face.

As someone who loves music and finds joy, comfort and strength in Christian hymns and songs, I have found a recent song that speaks to the power of God. It is a song by the popular Christian group Rend Collective entitled "His Name is Power." The lyrics go like this:

You're the only answer to the darkness  
 You're the only right among the wrong  
 You're the only hope among the chaos  
 You are the voice that calls me on  
 Louder than every lie  
 Our sword in every fight  
 The truth will chase away the night

Your name is power over darkness  
 Freedom for the captives  
 Mercy for the broken and the hopeless  
 Your name is faithful in the battle  
 Glory in the struggle  
 Mighty it won't let us down or fail us  
 Your name is power

I know it is written, *hope is certain*  
 I know that *the word* will never fail  
 I know that in every situation  
 You speak the power to prevail  
 Louder than every lie  
 Our sword in every fight  
 The truth will chase away the night

When you speak you scatter darkness  
 Light arrives and heaven opens  
 Holy Spirit  
 Let us hear it

When you speak the church awakens  
 We believe the change is coming  
 Holy Spirit  
 Let us see it

His **name**, not any action though He could certainly use His actions and does use His actions when He desires to, but just simply His name, the name we can call on in our times of struggle and chaos, is **power** over darkness, **freedom** from the captives, **mercy** for the broken and the hopeless. His name is **faithful** in the battle, **glory** in the struggle, **mighty** and it won't ever let us down or fail us. **His name is power.**

We have all the answers to life's tough questions in the Word of God. We have access, through prayer, to the Creator of all things and the One whose name is power. As Christians, we find our hope in the One who knelt beside the mother holding her dying son on the roadside as she shared her faith and showed compassion, even in the midst of her nightmare, for the eternal salvation of those who were seeking to help her.

In Isaiah 41:10 we find these words, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Proverbs 3: 5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

In Jeremiah 29:11 we read, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, **BUT** take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus spoke these words in conclusion to all the things He taught His disciples following the Last Supper. He knew how badly their lives would be shaken when He, their Messiah, would be unjustly arrested, humiliated, beaten and nailed to a cross. Hardships would challenge ***everything*** the disciples hoped and believed, even though Jesus tried to prepare them for it. Anticipating this, and also the persecution to come, Jesus looked to put their minds at ease with these words of comfort and we can take comfort in them as well. Jesus told His disciples that choosing to live their lives for Him would be troublesome and, at times, hard. Finding God in the hard times begins with a realization that Jesus declared, "***In Me you will find peace.***"

Friends, troubles are unavoidable in this life. Persecution is sure to come in some form. But, in Christ, there is peace. If we are just **of** this world, it is impossible to have peace with the uncertainty and troubles surrounding us. If we are **in** Christ, He is in us. Therefore, we can have peace even when we see nothing but trouble coming our way. Why? Because Jesus has overcome the world. Remember, Jesus told us so in John 16:33 when He said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." God never said our lives would be trouble free. The

Christian life is not about being perfect or free from worry, BUT it is about resting in the one who has overcome the world.

When Jesus spoke these words of encouragement to His disciples, He was prophesying a future reality, knowing that He still had to endure – through the cross – death and the grave. But He knew He would overcome by rising again on the third day, which we just recently celebrated together. In Christ, we already have the victory even though we must endure hardships. We can be victorious through the trials of life because Jesus is the guarantee of our future reality.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” We find this in the first chapter of Acts, verse 8. Jesus spoke these words just before He was taken up into heaven. He let it be known that God was looking for more than our best, especially when times are easy. He is looking for a lifestyle and an attitude that surpasses our best, a lifestyle and attitude that we could never achieve through our own efforts.

Think about this. If we were not going to need to be saved during this life on earth, then why did God send us a Savior? The promise of a Savior was because God knew we would need help. He knew we would mess up. He knew we would face trials and tribulations. The promise of a Savior was Jesus’ way of revealing one of the greatest truths of the Christian life and that is that ***the Christian life is impossible without Christ.*** Seems fairly obvious, right? The quality of life Jesus expects from His followers is out of our reach without Christ’s help in our lives.

God’s kingdom and His people can thrive among the uncertainties and troubles of life. Fire beetles are unique insects that thrive in fire-scorched areas. When forest fires break out, all creatures are forced to pursue safety and save themselves. Fire beetles do the complete opposite. They are drawn to the fires. In fact, the fire beetles were created with sensors that can detect forest fires from miles away. These sensors direct the beetles to the fire. While other creatures are running from the fire, these beetles head for the flames. They are equipped to thrive in the fire-scorched forest. It is the ideal place for them to lay their eggs safely and multiply in numbers. It is a safe place because all their predators have been driven out by the fire.

On the day of Pentecost, an internal fire was ignited in the life of the early church. The fire changed the lives of Jesus’s disciples and other believers. They were changed into men and women who were willing to pursue lost souls at any cost. They went into areas where there was great persecution. Their faith enabled them to run into the fires of trouble and danger to advance the Kingdom of God. Despite persecution, the early church rapidly grew. They were like fire beetles thriving in the fires of chaos and tribulation.

As Christians, we find our hope in the Lord. Pastor Smith recently said this in a sermon he preached on hope. He said, “Hope is the ability to see a path to the future. With Jesus there is always a path to the future and a path to hope.” We put our hope and trust in Him and we

walk by faith. The Bible is full of verses on hope. In fact, the word hope is used 166 times in the Bible.

Paul refers in Colossians 1:23 to “the hope of the gospel.” And there is no sweeter message of hope in all the world than to hear God announce that when you get up in the morning miserable and depressed with a sense of guilt before a holy God, you can go to bed that very night – this night – with a quiet and peaceful heart knowing that every sin you have ever committed and ever will commit is forgiven and you are reconciled to the Almighty by the death of his Son. That’s the free offer of the gospel!

And the gospel is the good news that there is hope for sinners, the worst of sinners - the hope of forgiveness; the hope of reconciliation; the hope of holiness.

But the hope of the gospel is more. It is a worldwide hope, and nothing else will satisfy our hearts in the end. It is the voice of the Lord that strips the forests bare. It is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:11–12). It is like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). It goes forth from his mouth and does not return empty, but accomplishes that for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:11). The grass withers and the flowers fall but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

And therefore it will reach to every people and tongue and tribe and nation; the ransomed will be called; the full number of the Gentiles will come in; the eyes of all Israel will be opened; and the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The wheat and the tares will be divided: one into the furnace of fire, the other into the master’s granary. And those who have believed the gospel will shine like the Son in the kingdom of their Father. And they shall reign forever and ever in light.

This is the great global hope of the gospel! Let him who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires take the water of life without price. Receive the gospel. Stand in it. Hold it fast. There is no other hope than “the hope of the gospel.”

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is **not** the desire for something you know will **not** happen. In the Bible, hope is defined as ‘an assured expectation’. To ‘rejoice in the hope of the glory of God,’ as Paul puts it in Romans 5:2b, is to live ‘with joyful confidence’ in God (Swindoll, 112), in the trustworthiness of His promises and the sufficiency of His grace.

Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” As God’s people we need to be like the fire beetles. When everyone else is running away from their hardships or looking for answers and coming up empty, God’s people run to it knowing that we are not going into battle alone. We have the hope of the Gospel! We want to see Jesus shine in the darkness. We should be willing to risk everything for love’s sake. We can reap joy by bringing Jesus into the center of the chaos and hardships. Because of the love, faithfulness and sacrifices of thousands of Christians through the ages, many hearts have been won for Jesus. Just as fire beetles are drawn to the mayhem of a forest fire to multiply, Christians are drawn to war-torn regions around the world to proclaim the

Gospel. They are willing to go into the fire in an effort to seek and save the lost. The world around us is hurting. Maybe even many of you are hurting or may be in the midst of hardships even now. People everywhere are desperate for hope and a real sense of peace especially in today's time of isolation, quarantine and economic uncertainty. Jesus came into the world to heal our brokenness and to set us free.

In Luke 4:18, Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free." **Only Jesus** can set the captive free. Only in Him can **true life change begin**. When we look around and see those who are hurting and broken, or when we find ourselves among the hurting and broken, the beat down and oppressed, the sick, the poor and the lonely, we should remember these words, "Jesus wants to be here!" Right here in the midst of the misery, the hardships and the troubles – in the chaos, wherever it may be. He is **always** with us.

Like fire beetles and the spirit-filled early church, let's be willing to go to the difficult places where the gospel message of salvation, hope, and freedom found only in Christ is needed the most. Let's be willing to bring Jesus into the hardships. When we get frustrated with our circumstances, we need to pause and seek Him. He is there, waiting, because there are people that need Him. We **need** Him. **All of humanity** needs Him.

God's will is not just about us, it's about His kingdom. We are called to be His hands and feet. Sometimes we miss God's will because we get caught up in *our own desires* and not His. I wonder how many times in my life I may have missed out on seeing God at work because all I could see was me and what I wanted. Even in the midst of trials and troubles we need to remember that God will not waste these opportunities. He uses these to refine us, to mold us and to make us into what **He** wants us to be in accordance with **His will**, all to **His glory!**

When we are down at our lowest point, the enemy will attempt to strike and push us further to the edge to see what we truly believe. It is at that point that we must stand firm in our faith and in the hope that we have in the **work** and **person** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We **must** believe that God is there even when it seems like all is lost. Ephesians reminds us in chapter 6 verse 3 to "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." When we are face-to-face with the enemy, we are called to stand our ground. Even if the situation is completely out of control, even though it feels as if all hell is coming against us, we are called to stand!

I recently read EPC missionary and pastor Andrew Brunson's book, "God's Hostage" and I highly recommend it to you all. In his book, Andrew details, as his book jacket describes, his incredible true story of imprisonment, his brokenness, his faithfulness and, eventually, his freedom. At one of his lowest points of hopelessness during his 735 days in a Turkish prison, Andrew contemplated suicide as his fear of losing his faith grew. As we talked about earlier, one of the greatest fears of man is to be abandoned by God. Andrew was facing that fear. But even in the midst of his personal hell, God was there. At that moment, when Andrew was



faced with isolation, full of doubt and had convinced himself it would be better to end his life than lose his faith, God sent him hope in the form of a familiar visitor, his wife Norine. Though their visit was short, God used this time to provide a sliver of hope to Andrew. Knowing that He had greater things in store for him and he would one day be able to tell his story to encourage the world. Andrew said Norine told him many times, “If we are faithful with this, and go through in the right way, we will say we have no regrets because of what it will accomplish.” We have no regrets, Andrew writes.

As he closes his book Andrew says this, “I was Erdogan’s hostage (the President of Turkey), but only until God accomplished what **He** intended to **through** my imprisonment. And then, at the right time, God kept His word--the word He gave to me right before all of this started, the word I clung to throughout my imprisonment. ***It’s time to come home.*** He brought me home.”

David is so bold as to say in Psalm 25 that “no one whose hope is in (the Lord) will ever be put to shame” (25:3). In Isaiah 49:23, the Lord Himself says: “Those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” Here is what Pastor Smith said about disappointment in our lives.

When referring to the Scripture we just read on David, Pastor Smith said, “Does this mean that if your hope is in Christ, you will never experience disappointments or defeats in this life? Of course not. Does it mean that you are exempt from the ordinary difficulties of life? No. Does it mean you will never encounter obstacles or opposition or criticism, or suffer setbacks in the course of life? No.

“Here is what it means: It means that if you put your trust in God, if you take God at His word, if you trust Him to keep His word and to do what He has promised, you will not be disappointed in the outcome. You will be blessed. Beyond your wildest imagination. When we get to heaven and see God face to face in the fullness of His glory, we will be in for some surprises – happy surprises – that are just **way** beyond anything the most fertile human mind can conceive. Even though we must all go through hardships of different kinds in this life, **no one** whose hope is in God – **no one** who has the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their life – will be disappointed when we see how it all turns out in the end. In fact, far from being disappointed, we will be so overwhelmed with joy in our hearts and **gratitude to God** that we will find ourselves, in the words of the hymn by Charles Wesley, ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise.’”

We can look at the story of David in the Bible and see multiple times throughout his life where he found His strength in the Lord during difficult times. He learned in his youth to trust the Lord. While he tended his father’s sheep he was attacked by a lion and a bear, but the Lord delivered him. When the mighty giant Goliath stood towering over him and taunting him, David stood his ground knowing the Lord was on his side. Even though he brought a rock to a sword fight, he took Goliath down with just a sling and a stone. David strengthened himself in the Lord.

Like David, when we find ourselves at our faith’s most vulnerable moments, we need to find God. We need to seek Him for He is near. He is right beside us waiting for us to cry out in

our time of need. When we do this, our faith will be strengthened, and our victory is sure. God is always with us, waiting patiently for us to turn to Him.

Pastor Smith shared an article with me in recent days from Christianity Today entitled, “Resurrection Hope Extends Beyond Easter,” by Jarvis J. Williams who is an associate professor of New Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In the article, Williams warns against letting the current pandemic and all the fear and suffering that has come along with it rob us of the joy and hope of Easter. He says, “Jesus’ resurrection is not reserved for a single Sunday. Easter may have passed, but the hope of Resurrection is new every morning because Jesus is physically risen from the dead.

Jesus died for our sins, physically rose from the dead, and appeared to many eyewitnesses as recounted in the Gospels and throughout the Epistles. In the New Testament, hope is a confident expectation that God has fulfilled and will fulfill his promises of redemption for his people and for the world in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Christians especially need to remember this word during times of suffering. As Paul himself attests, because we’ve been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, we have both *peace with God* and *hope in God* when we suffer (Rom. 5:1–5). This hope “does not disappoint” (v. 5, NLT).

He goes on to say, “We mourn the world’s current plight. Yet we do not give up on the joy of Resurrection Sunday, with its triumphant hymns proclaiming a risen Savior. Our tears flow from hearts of hopeful lament. We eagerly wait for God in Christ to bring about creation’s redemption from its bondage to sin, sickness, death, and suffering, as we work toward and long for the flourishing of all image-bearers now” (Rom. 8:19–21, Gal. 6:10).

We can still have hope amid a pandemic, and even celebrate as we lament, because we believe in a God who proved sickness and death do not have the final word (1 Cor. 15).

Even right now, God is acting on our behalf because Jesus is risen from the dead. The Spirit matches creation’s groans of lament with prayers of inexpressible utterances as He helps us and prays for us when we don’t know what to pray because our current suffering is unbearable (Rom. 8:26–27). The Spirit’s prayers guarantee that God will work out our suffering for our good because of his redemptive work in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28–30).

He closes by saying this: “As he reigns, Jesus prays for us in anticipation of that great day when His redeemed will reign with him on earth in a glorified world (Rev. 19:1–22:21).

“In the meantime, we live with the hope of the Resurrection, and we practice a love ethic that compels us to *love our neighbors well* and wisely and to seek the common good of all people, even when that means we must practice social distancing and stay at home. We dream up new ways to share the message of God’s salvation with – and show the love of Christ to – our family and neighbors for whom Easter Sunday was just another day on the calendar. As the suffering around us grows, we pray for the gospel and God’s kingdom to continue to advance.

Easter Sunday has come and gone, and what lies ahead is unknown even to the best forecasters, statisticians, and scientists. ***But the truth of the Resurrection has not changed, and our hope in Jesus is still certain because He is risen from the dead!***

Trouble and hardships can and will continue to occur in our lives. They are unavoidable. They can happen for brief periods of time or they can go on for what seems like an eternity. Whenever we face trials and hardships we can cry out to our Heavenly Father for help. He wants us to cry out to him. Much like a father would do anything and everything in his power to keep his children safe and comfort them in their time of need, our Savior wants even more to do the same for us.

No matter what the situation is that we are experiencing, God knows what we are facing. He is everywhere, at all times! He stands right beside us in our trials and hard times, waiting for us to exercise our faith in His ability and for us to cry out to Him in our time of need. He delights in helping His children.

So what will you do the next time you find yourself surrounded by fear, hopelessness, confusion, uncertainty? Will you go at it alone, under your own strength and just **hope** for the best? Will you allow the enemy to tell you that you are alone and that God has abandoned you? Or will you run to God and find Him? You won't have to run far because He will already be there. When you turn to Him, surrender it all to Him and lay it at His feet, your faith will be strengthened, your hope will be restored and your victory will be sure for God is always in the midst of every trial we face.

Here is another word of encouragement from Pastor Smith: "Trust in God, take Him at His word, you will not be disappointed, but blessed beyond your wildest imagination! Hope is only to be found vertically. Hope that **lasts** comes from God. It's found in **Jesus**. He is our strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Psalm 146 warns us not to put hope in men but in the Lord for blessed are those whose hope is on the Lord.

"Friends, God is with you, for you, in you, right here, right now and forever! Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."

I will close with words from Psalm 25 where David says,

"Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."

May it be so in us. Now and Forever. Amen

\*Special thanks to Rev. Dr. Neil Smith for his contributions to this sermon

\*\*Excerpts and stories from Finding God In Chaos by Michael Denigan and God's Hostage: A True Story of Persecution, Imprisonment, and Perseverance by Dr. Andrew Brunson were referenced